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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EUR/NB, EUR/PPD, CA/VO, FSI/SPAS/CON, FRANKFURT
FOR RCO - BARBARA ARMSTRONG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: VISA WAIVER PROGRAM: INAUGURAL MEETING OF CONSULAR
WORKING GROUP IN LITHUANIA

REFS: A. STATE 98032

- [1](#)B. STATE 67069
- [1](#)C. STATE 26010
- [1](#)D. VILNIUS 410
- [1](#)E. VILNIUS 276
- [1](#)F. VILNIUS 162

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: Embassy and MFA officials discussed next steps to accomplish the items listed in Lithuania's roadmap for the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) at the inaugural meeting of the Consular Working Group (CWG). We discussed Lithuanian progress on meeting the requirements for sharing lost/stolen passport information and briefed on Lithuania's visa refusal and overstay rates, which all agreed was Lithuania's largest obstacle to qualifying for VWP. Lithuanian interlocutors offered us training on detecting fraud in Lithuanian passports and reiterated their desire to send officials on a Voluntary Visitor program to Washington. We agreed to expand public outreach efforts on visa issues, identifying several cooperative activities for the near-term. We expect our CWG, as a working level forum, to remain focused on addressing Roadmap issues in a collegial, cooperative manner. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. Participants:

Embassy Vilnius
Ruta D. Elvikis, Consul
Anthony A. Pahigian, Public Affairs Officer
Christian Yarnell, Vice Consul

Lithuania
Vaidotas Verba, Director of the Consular Department,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Petras Anusas, Deputy Director of the Consular Department
Rimgaudas Losys, Director of the Visas Division, Consular
Department
Marijus Petrusonis, Attache, Consular Department

[1](#)3. The first official meeting of our CWG was held at the Lithuanian MFA on June 29, 2005. The Lithuanian interlocutors emphasized their desire to keep CWG meetings on an informal level (refs D and F) and immediately got down to business.

Combating Passport Fraud

[1](#)3. We raised the importance of improving reporting of lost and stolen Lithuanian passports to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), points recently added to Lithuania's Roadmap using the language contained in State [1](#)111324. The MFA officials responded that Lithuania is now reporting all such cases directly to Interpol, through which, they thought, DHS should also receive the information. They promised to confirm this. Should DHS not be receiving the data in a timely manner, Verba said, Lithuania would be happy to explore a different method of transfer to DHS.

[1](#)4. Verba briefed the group on Lithuania's recent discovery of cases of high-quality photo-substitution of their new passports. He noted that the fraud is difficult to detect with special training, which is now being provided to Lithuanian consular officials. He offered to help arrange a similar training session for our Embassy employees. We gladly accepted the offer, and also expressed our desire to help arrange future training by a DHS fraud expert in Vilnius for Lithuanian border guard, immigration and consular officials. We also invited MFA officials to observe our visa interviews to improve their understanding of U.S. immigration law as it is applied and the current state of Lithuanian readiness for VWP, as well as provide context for the MFA in handling complaints from disgruntled visa applicants. Verba expressed interest in this and promised to get back to us to make arrangements.

VWP a Long-Term Goal

15. We briefed the group on Lithuania's refusal and overstay rates, sharing the Lithuanian adjusted refusal rates provided post by the Department. The CWG agreed that the high refusal rate (42.9% in FY 2004) and corollary overstay rate are the primary obstacles to Lithuanian VWP accession. The Lithuanian interlocutors reiterated their understanding that VWP accession would not occur overnight. We affirmed our commitment to conduct a new validation study using post-EU accession data and asked for the Lithuanian officials' assistance in measuring the current overstay rate. While they were uncertain about their ability to help in measuring this rate, they reaffirmed their willingness to publicly encourage Lithuanian citizens to use their visas properly. (any specifics on offer here?)

PD Efforts and Voluntary Visitor Trip

16. The CGW discussed possible public diplomacy efforts and agreed on two joint PD projects that that could be accomplished in the short term:

-- A joint radio interview to discuss the Visa Waiver, the Roadmap, and other visa issues.
-- A consular "roadshow" with Embassy and MFA officials to take the discussion on the Roadmap and other visa issues to smaller towns across Lithuania. The first in a series of such visits would be to a city with a history of producing economic migrants.

17. Verba reiterated his desire to send two or three Lithuanian officials on the Voluntary Visitor program being planned by Embassy Warsaw as well as for discussions on consular training and management practices. We requested biographical information for the proposed VolVis participants for submission to the Department.

Comment: A Productive, Informal Forum

18. While visa waiver is an important long-term objective for the GOL, its interest is tempered by a realistic understanding by its consular team of the work still to be done to qualify for participation. As a result, the Roadmap process in Lithuania has thus far avoided politicization. As long as it is not hijacked by outside political actors, we expect the CWG to remain a working-level group focused on visas and visa waiver. GOL officials agree with this approach and committed to continuing the cooperation that has marked our bilateral consular relationship for many years.

KELLY